



**National Institute for Literacy**

# From Assessment to Practice: Research-based Approaches to Teaching Adults to Read

**ALRWG**

**NIFL/NCSALL  
Adult Literacy Research Working Group**



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## Purpose

- Provide practical rationale for use of research-based principles
- Use two components of reading to illustrate research-based practices and the direct link between research and practical approaches to teaching adults to read
- Show how the four basic components of reading can provide a solid framework for assessment and instruction



## What is Reading?

### The Basic Components of Reading

- **Alphabetics:** The use of letters in an alphabet to represent spoken words
  - **Phonemic Awareness:** Knowledge of speech sounds
  - **Word Analysis (Phonics plus):** Letter-sound knowledge
- **Fluency:** Ability to read with speed and ease
- **Vocabulary:** Knowledge of word meanings
- **Comprehension:** Understanding a text, or “constructing meaning”



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# The Components of Reading

## Print-Based Components

### Alphabetic:

Phonemic Awareness

### Word Analysis

(decoding,  
word recognition;  
structural analysis)

### Fluency

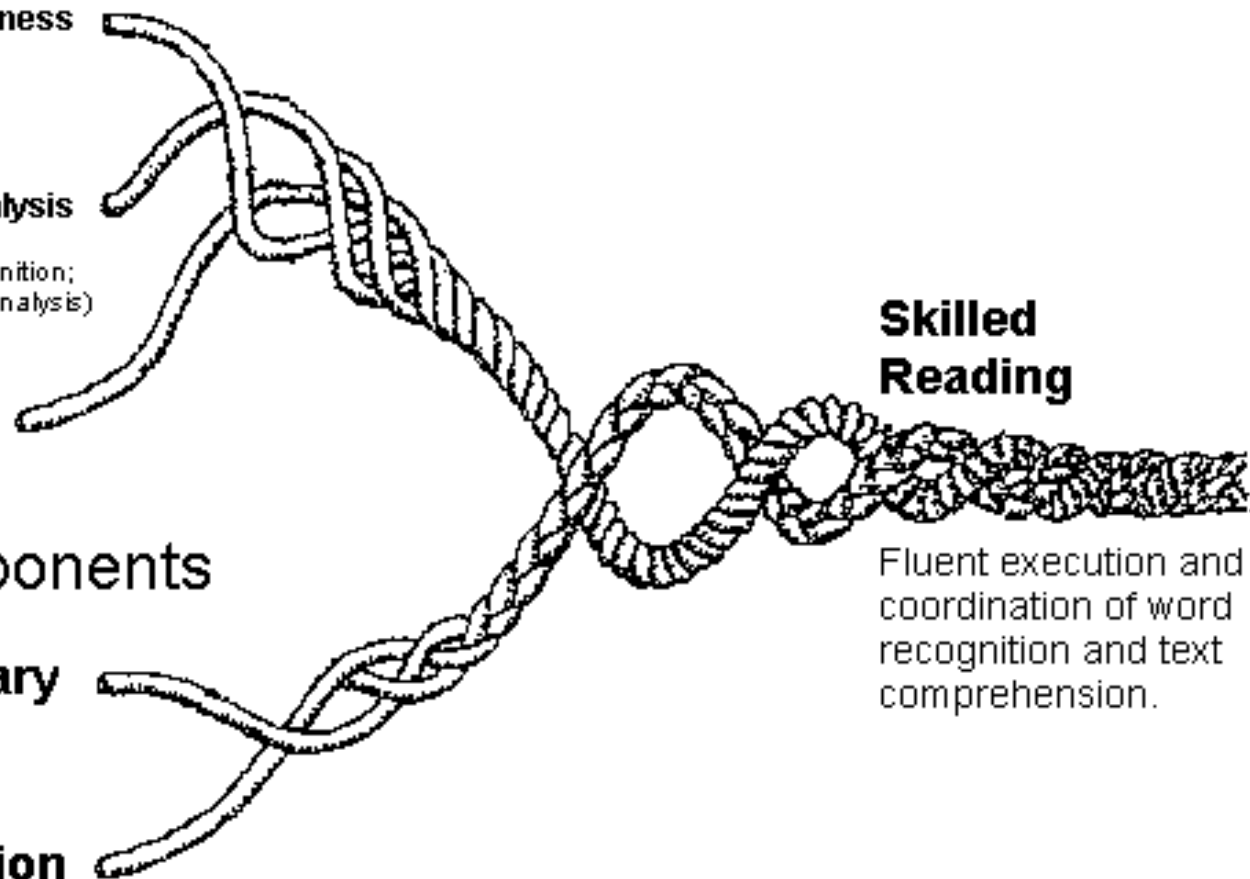
## Meaning-Based Components

### Vocabulary

### Comprehension

### Skilled Reading

Fluent execution and  
coordination of word  
recognition and text  
comprehension.





## Growth in Reading

### Beginning Readers

- Comprehension or meaning-based skills are better than print-based skills
- Work on print skills the most (though comprehension important)

### Advanced Readers

- Work on comprehension skills the most (though efficient decoding important)



## Adult Literacy Research Working Group (ALRWG)

### Purpose

- **Identify** existing research related to adult literacy reading instruction
- **Evaluate** research
- Provide research-based **products** – principles and teaching practices
- **Disseminate** products and information



## Assessment: Principle 1

- Adult education learners' reading abilities vary a lot, so assessing just one component of reading may not give enough information for instruction
- If all components of reading are assessed, the pattern of scores that results can be used to guide reading instruction





## Sample Profile

	Ed	Ruth
Reading Comprehension	6	6
Word Analysis —Decoding	2.6	7.5
Fluency	5	10
Oral Vocabulary	8	7



## Word Analysis Principles

- Principles 2: Adult non-readers lack *phonemic awareness*
- Principle 3: Adult beginning readers develop phonemic awareness as they learn to read
- Principle 4: Adult beginning readers have difficulty sounding out words
- Principle 7: Teach word analysis using direct instruction (and teach all components of reading)
- Use of a direct approach is supported by research at the K-12 level with children and adolescents.



## Some Test Concepts

[http://www.nifl.gov/readingprofiles/MC\\_Using\\_Assessments.htm](http://www.nifl.gov/readingprofiles/MC_Using_Assessments.htm)

- Standardized tests are administered and scored according to set procedures
  - Norm referenced tests
  - Criterion referenced tests
- Alternative assessments can be in any format that gives information about a learner's instructional needs and progress
- Ongoing assessments are those used continuously throughout instruction to make certain skills have been mastered



# Alphabetics Skills Assessment

Phonemic Awareness, five criterion referenced tasks

- Phoneme isolation
- Phoneme identity
- Phoneme blending
- Phoneme categorization
- Phoneme deletion



## Alphabetics Skills Assessment

### Word Recognition

- The ability to recognize the print form of a word, or a possible word, using both the letter- sound system (phonics) of a language and visual memory.
- Assess word recognition level with graded word lists, find the highest level at which there is effortless word recognition



## Alphabetics Skills Assessment

### Word Analysis

- Phonics - Find out which letter combinations have not been mastered for anyone with word recognition ability below 8<sup>th</sup> grade level. Sylvia Greene Inventory is on ASRP website



## Alphabetics Skills Assessment

### Word Analysis, cont'd

- Syllabication – assess skill by asking reader to decode one word of each of the seven syllable types.
  - Closed (by a consonant)
  - Open (ends in a vowel)
  - Final silent –e
  - Vowel combinations (2 vowels -> 1 sound)
  - R controlled
  - Final consonant + /e



## Decoding Instruction

What do you do with  
assessment results?





What if the test reveals a need for phonics instruction?

## **Research-based Recommendations**

**For beginners:** A structured curriculum

**For intermediates:** Explicit instruction  
focused on specific assessed needs



## Structured Phonics Curriculum

### Characteristics:

- Direct/explicit instruction
- Beginning with most basic elements and progressing gradually to more difficult
- Very structured lessons with lots of review
- Training probably required



## Decoding Instruction Based on Assessed Needs

Intermediate readers may have gaps in decoding skills.

Examples of needs identified through testing:

- 3-letter initial blends – str, spr
- ow (long-o sound), oi, oo (as in hood)
- R-controlled vowels (ar, er, ir, ur)
- Soft g (gem), soft c (city), ph, gh
- Multi-syllabic words



## Decoding Instruction Based on Assessed Needs

Teach words that exemplify these spelling-sound correspondences.

### **Three-letter initial blends:**

**Strap, strip, string, straight, stream, strategy, strength, stretch, strike**



## Decoding Instruction Based on Assessed Needs

### **R-controlled vowels:**

**a**rmey, arguement, article, p**a**rt, market, all**e**rgy,  
dangerous, operate, sell**e**r

sh**i**rt, thirst**y**, circle, confirm

urb**a**n, urg**e**nt, bur**u**st, occ**u**r



## Decoding Instruction Based on Assessed Needs

### “Soft g” and “Soft c”

**G**em, germ, generous, genu**in**e, ve**g**etable, lar**g**e,  
vill**ag**e, **g**iant, eng**in**e, orig**in**al, **g**ym, ener**g**y

**C**ent, ceil**in**g, celeb**ra**te, conc**er**t, proc**es**s, **c**ircle,  
cigar, **a**cid, penc**il**, **c**ycl**o**ne, fanc**y**



## Decoding Instruction Based on Assessed Needs

### **Multi-syllabic words:**

- Teach prefixes and suffixes
- Teach rules for dividing words into phonetic syllables and decoding the syllables



## Decoding Instruction Based on Assessed Needs

Example –

### **Rule for dividing words**

If there are two consonants between vowels, divide between them unless they form a blend or a digraph: men-tal, trac-tor, frag-ment (but fra-grant, wash-er,)

### **Rule for decoding**

If a syllable with one vowel ends in a consonant, the vowel often has the short sound.





## Instruction Based on Assessed Needs

Find rules and word lists in reading-teacher materials (and the dictionary)

A good resource:

*The Reading Teacher's Book of Lists, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition* (2006), Fry & Kress



## Instruction Based on Assessed Needs

Teach to fill in the gaps:

- Make a structured plan to cover needed skills and knowledge
- Demonstrate and model
- Provide lots of examples
- Provide lots of practice and review



## Comprehension Assessment

- Assessment Principle 11: Adult education students have difficulty with reading comprehension.
- Based on several studies, including large scale assessments of adult readers such as the NALS and NAAL.



## Comprehension Instruction

- Principle 15
  - Provide explicit instruction in comprehension strategies.
  - Teach all components of reading
- Supported by research at the K-12 level with children and adolescents.



## Comprehension Assessment

### Standardized norm referenced tests

- Increasingly difficult text passages or documents
- Questions that accompany the reading material are either in multiple choice or cloze (fill in the blank) formats.
  - Questions become increasingly difficult, from identifying stated elements in a passage to making inferences from the information that is given.



## Comprehension Assessment

### Standardized norm referenced tests (cont'd)

- The TABE, CASAS, ABLE, Woodcock Batteries are examples.
- Tests may measure one aspect of reading comprehension such as background knowledge or vocabulary. The PPVT-III measures vocabulary. Woodcock has tests of background knowledge.



## Comprehension Assessment

### Standardized criterion referenced tests

- The IRI assessments may ask test takers to summarize passages in addition to answering the multiple choice questions.
- Oral word meaning tests allow a teacher to assess the reader's depth of understanding of a word.



## Assessment of Comprehension Strategies

- Ask learners what they do when they do not understand a passage?
- Do they have a plan based on their knowledge of comprehension strategies?
- Think about what would probably work best, teach it, have learner try it, assess the outcome.





## Poor Comprehension? Think about all the components

- Can they read the words?
- Do they know their meanings?
- Are they familiar with the sentence structure of material they are asked to read?
- Do they use helpful learned practices to comprehend text?



## Comprehension-Strategy Instruction

- Initial assessment shows limited comprehension –
- What do you do?



## What do you do?

- Assess the other components to see what might be contributing to the problem.
- Work on the component skills identified by assessments.
- Teach comprehension strategies.



## What is Strategy Instruction?

### Teaching learning tools—

- Principles
- Concepts
- Rules
- or Multi-step processes learners can use *independently* to solve problems or accomplish learning tasks



# Comprehension-Strategy Instruction

## **Why is comprehension-strategy instruction important?**

Many readers don't know they are not "getting it," and are unaware of the kind of active processing good readers do.



## Comprehension-Strategy Instruction

### Research-based Strategies

- Comprehension monitoring
- Graphic organizers
- Story structure
- Question answering
- Question generating
- Summarization
- Multiple-strategies instruction
- Cooperative learning (instructional approach)



# Comprehension-Strategy Instruction

Examples of comprehension-monitoring strategies:

- Restating
- Thinking aloud
- Coding text



## Comprehension-Strategy Instruction

### Restating:

Teach learners to get in the habit of stopping periodically—after each paragraph or section—and restating what they've read in their own words.





## Comprehension-Strategy Instruction

### Thinking aloud:

Teaching learners to think aloud as they process what they're reading. "Processing" may involve restating, noting important facts or concepts, guessing at word meanings using context clues, questioning or expressing confusion, looking back in the text to clarify something and then re-reading a phrase or sentence.



## Comprehension-Strategy Instruction

### Coding text:

Teaching learners to use a code to mark text as they read, for example, noting important terms or ideas (perhaps with \* or !), and marking words or sentences that aren't clear (with ?)



## Conclusion

- Research provides some very practical and useful approaches to teaching adults to read
- To illustrate this, we looked at alphabetics and comprehension today (not at fluency and vocabulary)
- Reading components provide a framework for assessment and instruction



## Conclusion

- Assess components to understand strengths and weaknesses
- Use assessment results to design plan for instruction, using research-based approaches to instruction
- Continue to assess in order to adjust plan for instruction as learner's reading grows and changes



## Resources

- Assessment Strategies and Reading Profiles Website -- [www.nifl.gov](http://www.nifl.gov)
- Applying Research in Reading Instruction for Adults -- <http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/publications.html>
- Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction --  
<http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/publications.html>



## Questions and Answer Session

Please use the text box to submit questions to presenters.

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***Thank you for joining us.***

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